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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TOKYO 004563

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/28/2017

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [BM](#) [SN](#) [JA](#)

SUBJECT: JAPANESE FOREIGN POLICY CHANGE ON BURMA UNLIKELY

Classified By: Ambassador J. Thomas Schieffer for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (U) This cable contains an action request. Please see paragraph 5.

2. (C) Summary: Tokyo is publicly condemning the violent government crackdown on demonstrators in Burma and is urging Burmese leaders to "exercise restraint," but has no plans to change its foreign policy strategy on Burma, MOFA contacts told Embassy Tokyo Political Officer on September 27. MOFA issued a public statement on September 25 urging the Burmese government to show restraint and Chief Cabinet Secretary Machimura repeated calls for Burma to resolve the current situation in a "constructive way" during press conferences on September 26 and 27. MOFA will convey its concerns to the Burmese Ambassador to Tokyo on September 27, MOFA First Southeast Asia Division Principal Deputy Director Atsushi Kuwabara noted. Japan is seeking details on the United States Government decision to tighten economic sanctions on Burma, he noted. Vice Foreign Minister Yabunaka is still planning to visit Burma on September 29 to October 3. End Summary.

#### Stepping Up Public Criticism on Crackdown

3. (C) Tokyo is publicly criticizing the crackdown while downplaying the need to increase pressure on Burma. MOFA spokesman Mitsuo Sakaba released a short two-sentence press statement on September 25 urging Burma to "exercise restraint" and to make "sincere efforts including dialogue for national reconciliation and democratization." Chief Cabinet Secretary Nobutaka Machimura is calling on the Burmese Government to refrain from using violence against protestors, and on September 27 told reporters the crackdown on protestors was "extremely regrettable." During an earlier press conference on September 26, Machimura told reporters he hoped the crackdown on demonstrators would be resolved "in a constructive fashion." Japan will keep "a close watch" on the situation, Foreign Minister Masahiko Komura told reporters during a separate press conference on September 26.

When Political Officer asked if Japan will take additional steps to pressure Burma if the growing monk-led protests trigger a violent repression, Kuwabara replied that Japan has no plan to change its foreign policy approach at this time but will watch the situation closely and take "appropriate measures" as needed. (Comment: MOFA confirmed a Japanese reporter was killed in Burma on September 27 and Machimura told reporters Japan will lodge a protest with the Burmese Government over the death. End Comment).

#### Questions on USG Tightening Economic Sanctions

4. (C) Turning to the September 25 announcement that the

United States will tighten economic sanctions on Burma, Kuwabara thanked Political Officer for sharing a copy of the September 25 White House press release and said it helps clarify confusion within MOFA on President Bush's September 25 speech at the United Nations. MOFA officials were uncertain what the decision to tighten economic sanctions meant, since the United States has already imposed sanctions on Burma. While the White House press release helps clarify this, additional information on what steps the United States plans to take would be appreciated, Kuwabara noted.

15. (C) ACTION REQUEST: Please provide additional details on U.S. plans to tighten economic sanctions on Burma, specifically information on how these sanctions will differ from the sanctions already in place under Executive Order 13047, Executive Order 13310, and the Burmese Freedom and Democracy Act. Details on USG plans to designate specific individuals identified as responsible for violations of human rights and for impeding the nation's transition to democracy would also be helpful.

#### Yabunaka's Upcoming Trip to Burma

16. (C) Turning to MOFA Vice Foreign Minister Mitoji Yabunaka's planned September 30 to October 3 trip to Burma, Yabunaka will meet with the Burmese Vice Foreign Minister, and MOFA is still working to confirm additional meetings. When asked if Yabunaka would be meeting with nongovernment officials during his visit, Kuwabara paused, and then hesitantly stated he did not have additional information to share with the United States at this time, and reiterated that meetings were still being arranged.

17. (C) In response to Political Officer's question on whether the Japanese Embassy in Burma had its own communication

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channels with nongovernmental officials, including pro-democracy leaders, Kuwabara explained that Japan has "information sources" outside the official Burmese Government, but stated Tokyo will not reveal who, or where, its interlocutors are located. (Comment: Kuwabara was evasive when responding to questions on Yabunaka's travel plans and schedule while in Burma. He was reluctant to comment on who Japanese Embassy officials meet with in Burma, and appeared to be less than completely forthcoming. He abruptly ended the meeting but said he looked forward to a more detailed meeting on Burma in the future. End Comment).

18. (C) Comment: MOFA's response to the crackdown in Burma may not accurately reflect Japan's concern that the protests could trigger a violent repression. For example, LDP House of Representatives member Kazuo Aichi told Tokyo Embassy on September 26 that he was anxious about the situation in Burma and said it is reminiscent of 1988. He explained that too much pressure on the military regime will merely make Burma more pro-China, a concern MOFA officials have expressed repeatedly in the past. He questioned the effectiveness of stopping Japanese ODA to Burma and said applying too much pressure would not be beneficial. End Comment.  
Schieffer